

Moreover, if Congress decides to allocate more government funds to increase faith-based organizations role in providing social services, we should make sure that we are getting our taxpayers' money worth. At a recent Brookings Institute conference recently on child care, Mary Bogle, a child care expert, cited several studies that reported that child care provided by churches was among the lowest quality in the country. These child care centers had higher staff-to-child ratios, lower levels of trained and educated teachers and less educated administrators than other non profit child care centers.

I for one do not want to be telling my constituents several years down the road that Congress spent money on social services based on whether they are religious rather than on their ability to provide quality services.

Please join me in opposing H.R. 7 and let's work together to seriously tackle the problem of poverty without legalizing government-sponsored discrimination.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, I rise to oppose H.R. 7, the Charitable Choice Act of 2001. I support the work that many religious charities do on behalf of those in the need in my community and across the nations. Currently, any church or religious organization can establish a charity and apply for federal funds. This legislation provides no additional money for those organizations. It simply would allow religious organizations that wish to discriminate to apply for federal funds. It would allow the rollback of many of the basic civil rights protections for all Americans currently enjoy. Allowing religious organization to discriminate in hiring on the basis of religion, sexual preference, and race is wrong.

Short-circuiting the current system also opens the door to federal interference in religious activities, which has prompted the opposition of many religious organizations and leaders. The litany of groups opposing this bill is long and contains the names of some of the most distinguished charitable and religious groups in the country.

Another unfortunate aspect is the failure to meaningfully assist the charitable contributions of low income Americans unable to itemize on income tax returns. As a result of other tax relief for people who need help the least, we are unable to assist those who are unduly penalized.

Given the flaws in this legislation, I oppose it, and urge my colleagues to do likewise.

Mr. WEXLER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in opposition to the Community Solutions Act of 2001.

In a 1780 letter, Benjamin Franklin wrote, "When religion is good, I conceive that it will support itself; and, when it cannot support itself, and G-d does not take care to support, so that its professors are obliged to call for the help of the civil power, it is a sign, I apprehend, of its being a bad one."

Forty-three years later, James Madison wrote in a letter, "Religion is essentially distinct from civil government and exempt from its cognizance . . . a connection between them is injurious to both."

Franklin and Madison's observations are still poignant, and relevant to today's debate on President Bush's social services plan. I join with many Americans who have great concerns about the provisions of his plan which punch holes in the firewall between places of worship and the government.

A number of religious organizations already run very valuable social service programs, and Americans appreciate the significant contributions that these religious groups make to the well being of our communities. However, this proposed faith-based legislation unnecessarily entwines church and state in a financial relationship under the mantra of improving social services.

The Founding Fathers understood that both church and state play important roles in the lives of Americans, but neither may function appropriately under our Constitution if they are heavily intertwined. The separation of church and state actually protects each from the other. Many Americans express concern over the potential for a disproportionate level of influence of religious doctrine upon the making of public policy. However, places of worship should also be concerned about interference from government. It would be a travesty if a financial relationship between the two became so significant that religious decisions are affected by concerns over public funding.

Let us be straight-forward about the crux of this debate: The question is not whether churches, synagogues or mosques should provide social services. Of course they should. The question is whether religious organizations should abide by federal civil rights laws if they take federal money. The answer again is of course they should.

Proponents of the President's plan call for the removal of "barriers" which religious charities face when attempting to secure public funding for their social service programs. These so-called "barriers" are America's civil rights laws, and we must not compromise them. If a privately-funded place of worship directs its employees to follow its religious dictates, then it is within its rights to do so. However, if it uses public funds, then it should not be allowed to discriminate against anyone.

While we should always look for better ways to provide social services, I do not believe that the separation between church and state need to be dismantled to do so. I ask that you vote against the bill.

Ms. MCCOLLUM. Mr. Speaker, today I will vote against H.R. 7, the Community Solutions Act, because I strongly support the constitutional separation of church and state, and I believe this bill infringes on that separation. The bill would threaten religious autonomy, as religious organizations would be subject to government regulations in exchange for federal funds. The truth is that the federal government can already fund faith-based charities if they meet the following three conditions: they establish a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt charitable organization, they agree not to proselytize using tax dollars, and they cannot discriminate in job hiring. H.R. 7 would remove these important protections. I also believe this bill allows federal intrusion on state and local jurisdiction, as faith-based groups would not have to adhere to Minnesota's comprehensive state and local nondiscrimination laws.

I recognize the very important contributions of faith-based organizations to our communities and families. Some successful faith-based organizations in Minnesota such as Church Charities, Lutheran Social Services, and Jewish Family and Children's Services have developed a reputation for providing quality services without religious discrimination. These organizations certainly complement many governmental social services

and I would not want to see their roles diminished in the lives of so many Minnesotans. This bill has the potential to interfere in the historic working relationships between faith-based organizations, the government, and the people they so generously serve.

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Mr. Speaker, I must join my colleagues who have spoken in opposition to H.R. 7.

Never can I or will I ever support a piece of legislation which would allow and therefore support discrimination in any way shape or form.

I am proud to be a member of the Congressional Black Caucus which does not oppose, but strongly supports, making funding available to support our religious organization's work in the world, but voted unanimously to oppose the egregious parts of the bill which allow the provisions of the hard fought for civil rights laws to be sidestepped.

As an African-American and a Christian, I must also say that I am insulted and deeply resent the way the administration has specifically courted the Black Church with this initiative because H.R. 7 falsely advertises the initiative as new, and also as funded, and it most egregiously, allows discrimination.

Mr. Speaker, I am and have always been a strong supporter of the work that religious groups such as Lutheran Social Services, Catholic Social Services, the Inter-Faith Coalition, the Moravian conference, The Seventh Day Adventist Church and others have been doing.

In addition to these concerns, I am also very troubled by the fact that H.R. 7 contains a provision that allows any federal agency to convert their entire services programs into a voucher in order to circumvent protections against discrimination that are provided for under federal law.

This most uncharitable bill goes beyond the question of violating the principle of separation of Church and State, first by allowing discrimination and then by purporting to provide funds for religious and other organizations when it doesn't actually provide any new dollars in the bill at all. Neither should they now, that the lack of funding is uncovered, be allowed to raid the Medicare Trust Fund.

As an African-American and a Christian, I must also say that I am insulted and deeply resent the way the administration has specifically courted the Black Church with this initiative because of the aforementioned aspects of H.R. 7 to which I have objected.

Mr. Speaker, I am and have always been a strong supporter of the work that religious groups in my and other communities do. Federal support of Faith based organizations is not new. In my district, groups such as Lutheran Social Services, Catholic Social Services, the Inter-Faith Coalition, the Moravian conference, The Seventh Day Adventist Church and others have been doing a tremendous job serving the needy in Virgin Islanders for many years now and will continue to do so with or without this bill.

Where there efforts are hampered is through the recent tax cut which will drastically cut funding from the programs that help those in our communities who need an extra hand up—in education, in health care services, in housing, in economic opportunity, and in programs that would promote an improved quality of life.

And it just astounds me that while the Administration is pushing this initiative "as" one